

## THE MONKEY HEART TREE (Sumsumāra Jataka)

There was once a strong monkey who lived in a forest near a river. And in the river lived a big male crocodile and his wife.

One day, the wife crocodile saw the monkey on the riverbank, and she really wanted to have its heart to eat. She had heard that the heart of a monkey is very tasty.



She crawled up to her husband, and closed her eyes to appear as sweet and charming as possible. She said, “Dear, I would really like to eat the heart of that great big monkey.”

Her husband crocodile said, “But I live in the water, and he lives on dry land. How can we catch him?”

The wife pleaded, “Oh, somehow, he must be caught. If I don’t get his heart to eat, I’ll die.”

The husband wasn’t sure how he was going to catch that big monkey. But he couldn’t tell her “no.” She wanted that monkey heart and she wasn’t going to take “no” for an answer.

He thought for a moment, and then he said, “All right, don’t worry, I have a plan. I’ll give you his heart to eat.”

She looked at him with a pleased expression on her face.



Later that day, the monkey went to the river bank to drink water. After he drank, he sat up in a tree. The male crocodile swam up to the river bank where the monkey was sitting and asked,

“Sir monkey, why do you eat bad fruits in this same old place? On the other side of the river there are so many mango trees and other fruit trees, with fruits as sweet as honey! Isn’t it better to cross the river and have all kinds of sweet fruit to eat?”

The monkey replied, “Sir crocodile, the river is deep and wide. How should I get across?”



The crocodile suggested,

“If you want to go, I will let you ride on my back and carry you over.”

The monkey trusted him, and agreed.

So the crocodile said, “Come here, then, get up on my back.”



The monkey climbed onto his back. The crocodile glided out toward the middle of the river.

This was the first time the monkey had ever

ridden on a crocodile's back. And it was the first time he had ever ridden on any animal that was swimming. He was a bit nervous, especially at first. It was a strange but pleasant ride.



Then suddenly, the crocodile twisted his back so the monkey fell off, and was up to his chin in the water. The monkey cried out,

“Ah! My friend, you are letting me sink in the water! What did you do that for?”

The crocodile snarled, “You think I am carrying you because I am a

nice guy? No. My wife wants to eat your heart and I am going to give it to her!”

The monkey, splashing around and struggling to stay afloat in the water, was panicking, terrified that now he surely was going to drown or be killed by the crocodile. He had to do something to save himself! There was nothing to hold onto to keep his head above water except the crocodile. Somehow, he had to convince the crocodile not to kill him but to let him climb on his back again. He thought quickly and said, as he was gasping for breath,

“Friend, I’m glad you told me. If our hearts were inside of us monkeys when we go jumping high up among the trees, then they would bounce out of our chests and break into pieces.”

The crocodile was surprised, and asked, “Well, where do you keep your heart then?”



The monkey clambered onto the crocodile’s back and pointed to a fig tree on the riverbank where they had started off. The tree had clusters of ripe figs hanging from it. The monkey said,

“See, there are our hearts hanging on that fig tree.”

The crocodile, remembering what his wife wanted, said, “Well, if you show me your heart, then I won’t kill you.”

The monkey urged him,

“Take me to the tree then, and I’ll point it out to you, hanging on the tree.”

The crocodile carried him back to the riverbank. The monkey immediately jumped off his back, climbed up the fig tree and sat high up on a branch, far away from those huge dangerous jaws and sharp teeth.

He scolded the crocodile,



“Oh you silly crocodile, you thought there were creatures that kept their hearts on trees! You thought you could fool me, but I outwitted you! You can keep your fruit to yourself. I don't need the mangos and all the fruits across the water there. I am happy and content with figs. They are good enough for me. Now go away, sir crocodile.”

The crocodile felt sad and miserable. He had to return to his wife with nothing.

#### QUESTIONS:

1. Why did the crocodile want to catch the monkey? (His wife wanted to eat a monkey's heart)
2. Why do you think the crocodile wife said, “if I don't get his heart to eat, I'll die”? (she was trying to pressure her husband to get the monkey's heart).
3. Did the crocodile really intend to take the monkey across the river to the fruit trees? (no)
4. Did the monkey trust the crocodile's word that he was going to take him across the river to the fruit trees? (yes)
5. Where did the monkey say that the monkeys' hearts were? (hanging on the fig tree)
6. Why did the monkey tell him that? (so he wouldn't be killed or drowned, and the crocodile would take him back to the riverbank)

## DHARMA DISCUSSION – Dishonesty:

The monkey trusted the crocodile, and when he found himself dumped in the water, he felt not only terrified that he would die, but what else might he have felt toward the crocodile? Betrayed, fooled, and maybe angry.

The crocodile tricked, or deceived, the monkey.  
He tempted the monkey to want some tasty fruit, and said he would take the monkey across the river to get it, so he could attack him once they were out in the river where the monkey couldn't run away.  
He didn't intend to do what he said he would do.  
That was dishonesty - saying you're going to do something but not intending to do it.

Sometimes we tell someone we're going to do something but then we forget to do it. But the other person might not know whether you just forgot, or whether you really never meant to do it.  
Has someone ever told you they would do something that was important to you, and then didn't do it?  
How did you feel? Disappointed, betrayed, let down, or angry?  
Did you think they probably forgot? Or did you think they may have been dishonest, never intending to do what they said they would do?  
Did you feel you couldn't trust him or her as much afterward?

When someone is dishonest, what happens to our trust?  
We start to lose trust in that person.  
When a person often doesn't do what they say, or when they often lie, can you trust them? Probably not. And that can ruin a friendship.  
Trust is extremely important in friendships and other relationships – with family members, teachers, coaches, and others.  
Even one lie, one act of dishonesty, sometimes can destroy a relationship.  
And one lie often leads to what? More lies, and then a habit of lies.

So it's important to make sure that when we say we're going to do something, we remember to do it. We should try to keep our word.  
If you say "I will" or "I'll do it" – then remember, others expect you to do it, and if you don't, they may be disappointed or angry.  
If you aren't sure you will be able to do it, what can you say so they don't definitely expect you to do it? You can say "I'll try" or "I plan to," "I expect to," or "I hope I can." Then if you can't, they aren't too disappointed.

What about the monkey in the story – was he honest? No.

Did he lie? Yes, he lied about monkeys hanging their hearts on the fig tree, and he was dishonest when he said he would point out his heart in the tree.

Why did he lie? Because he would have been killed otherwise.

Is that a good reason to lie? If we can't avoid lying in an emergency situation to save someone's life, then it's better to save a life by lying.

But that's a very rare situation.

Why do people usually lie? Often, people lie to avoid getting in trouble, scolded, criticized or punished, or to avoid being embarrassed.

Are those good reasons to lie? No, usually not.

What should we do in the first place, so we don't have to even think about lying to hide our mistakes? We should try to avoid misbehaving so we are not tempted to lie to cover it up, to avoid punishment.

If we try to behave well, then what happens when we do make a mistake and we are honest about it, when we admit we are wrong? Do we get harshly punished? Usually others are more forgiving; they usually respect us for being honest about what we did wrong. Then if we get scolded or punished, it's not as bad as if they found out we lied.

Sometimes we are tempted to lie to someone to avoid upsetting them.

If we tell the truth, we think they would be terribly upset.

Have you ever been in that situation?

It's sometimes difficult to decide what to say.

What we should say depends on who we are talking to.

If it's a parent or teacher, we have a duty to be honest even if our parent or teacher might be upset, because our parents and teachers guide us. We must tell them the truth so they can help us.

In other situations, we should try to be honest, but we should be very careful, understanding and compassionate in how we communicate.

For example, if a friend, brother or sister asks you how you like their project on which they worked very hard, and you think it's not very good, what would you say?

You might point out what you like about their project. You might gently suggest some improvements they could make.

In general, to be an honest person, we should try to make sure that what we think matches what we say, and what we say matches what we do: we say what we really did or what we really intend to do, what is really in our mind, and we make sure to do what we say we're going to do.